

# American Farm Bureau Federation

## Regulation-averse Farm Bureau policies more realistic under Trump

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Many of the policy recommendations voted upon by the American Farm Bureau Federation's regional delegates at the end of annual conventions once seemed unrealistic.

After all, how likely was it that the Obama administration would sharply curtail regulations on labor practices, pesticide usage and biotechnology?

With a regulation-averse Trump administration and Republican-controlled Congress, however, these policy positions may not be so outlandish anymore.

For example, during the Jan. 9 business session held at the organization's convention here, the delegates recommended repealing the Obama-era "Worker Protection Standards" that imposed stricter conditions on pesticides.

They also decided the U.S. Department of Labor should provide seven days notice before performing a labor audit and that wages under the H-2A farm guest-worker program should be lowered to better reflect local conditions and reduce the financial burden on growers.

Such goals are largely "aspirational," but it's not unfeasible for such federal rules to be mitigated, said Paul Schlegel, AFBF's deputy director of public policy.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has announced that it may revise several key provisions of the Worker Protection Standards and release them for public comment by September, he said.

The Farm Bureau is hopeful that EPA will allow states



Courtesy American Farm Bureau Federation

AFBF President Zippy Duvall and Vice President Scott VanderWal preside over the organization's policy session during this week's national convention.

to determine the appropriate age at which workers apply pesticides, down from the Obama-era minimum of 18 years, Schlegel said.

The agency may also change pesticide spray exclusion zones, which currently require buffers that effectively take land out of production, to make the rules more workable for farmers, he said.

It's particularly important for EPA to revise the "designated representative" rule, which forces farmers to release two years of pesticide records to designated representatives of farmworkers, he said.

As it's currently worded, the provision could easily be exploited by anti-pesticide groups to sow fear about spraying certain chemicals, Schlegel said.

As for labor regulations, such as the seven day notice before DOL audits, farmers just want to be treated fairly and not have the agency put them in a "gotcha" situation, he said.

Such recommended policies aren't intended to allow growers to skirt the rule of law, Schlegel said. "I don't

think growers are looking for a get out of jail card."

Some policy recommendations proved more controversial than others during the Jan. 9 voting session.

A couple delegates objected to the recommended withdrawal of federal funds from "sanctuary" jurisdictions, which refuse to comply with federal officers' requests to hold illegal immigrants arrested for crimes.

Delegates from California and New York argued this policy would be similar to the sanctions imposed on rogue nations — they won't much hurt the responsible politicians but they will adversely impact farmers and farm workers.

Despite these arguments, the delegates voted to approve the sanctuary jurisdiction policy.

Changing the Farm Bureau's policy make mandatory "country of origin labeling," or COOL, for meat also drew diverging opinions. Under current AFBF policy, the group prefers COOL to be voluntary.

Some farmers said that with President Donald Trump renegotiating the North

American Free Trade Agreement, or NAFTA, there's the opportunity to make Canada and Mexico agree to this provision.

Opponents of the proposal said it would violate World Trade Organization rules and potentially disrupt exports, which are critical for beef producers right now.

A proponent of the COOL provision declared, "I don't mind wearing a Chinese T-shirt but I don't want to eat a Chinese hamburger."

While the declaration got a hearty laugh, delegates voted against the mandatory COOL policy.

The Farm Bureau's existing policy for solar development — which calls for panels to be installed on marginal or underused land — came under attack from property rights-minded farmers.

One delegate said he understood the intention behind the provision but was uncomfortable with dictating what other growers should do with their land.

Another farmer countered that the policy doesn't bar solar development, but simply suggests it not occur on high-value farmland.

Solar projects can also be used as a strategy by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management to cancel grazing leases on its property by declaring the land underused and then approving solar facilities, the grower said.

Ultimately, the delegates opted to keep the policy recommending solar development on marginal land.

Two votes were entirely uncontroversial: After praising AFBF President Zippy Duvall and Vice President Scott VanderWal, the delegates unanimously re-elected the two officers for two more years.

## 'I am proud to stand with you'

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assets to \$11 million, was also included in the bill despite being "a tough one to get," he said.

Farmers gave Trump a standing ovation upon mention of the estate tax change, which led him to comment that they must love their families.

"It's not going to help you much," he said. "It's going to help them a lot."

Trump briefly touched on the North American Free Trade Agreement, saying that he's working hard to get a better deal. NAFTA was a common target during his presidential campaign but is generally popular in agriculture.

He took a feistier approach to immigration, another sensitive subject due to labor shortages in agriculture, by reiterating tough stances from his presidential campaign.

"We are going to end chain migration, we are going to end the (visa) lottery system and we are going to build the wall," Trump said.

Looking forward to the upcoming farm bill negotiations, Trump said he would push Congress to enact new legislation before the previous version expires in 2018.

Trump said he'd insist the bill should include crop insurance, "unless you don't want me to," he said.

Hearing the audience applaud, he remarked, "I guess you like it."

If the response was less

enthusiastic, he joked, "forget it."

Growers can also look forward to road and infrastructure projects being completed "under budget and on schedule," Trump said, urging them to follow these developments on his Twitter account.

"It's the only way to get around the media," he said. "Fake media."

At the conclusion of his speech, Trump told the crowd they could anticipate a new era of patriotism and pride under his tenure.

"I am proud to stand with you, and I will be standing with you for many years to come," he said.

The event was punctuated by Trump signing two presidential orders aimed at improving rural broadband service. USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue also presented the president with the findings from his Interagency Task Force on Agriculture and Rural Prosperity.

The report recommends improving "e-connectivity" to increase rural productivity with high-speed internet access, enhancing rural quality of life with modern utilities, transportation and housing, as well as providing training and other services to develop the rural workforce.

"Harnessing technological innovation" in agriculture, manufacturing and other industries is also recommended in the report, as is overall economic development through tourism, energy, logging and technology.

## Farm Bureau grateful to Trump but anxious on trade

### Nation's largest farm group meets in Nashville, Tenn.

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Make no mistake about it: The folks at the American Farm Bureau Federation are grateful to President Donald Trump.

For agriculture, the atmosphere in the nation's capital has much improved in the year that Trump has been in office, said Zippy Duvall, the organization's president, during the Jan. 7 opening session of its annual convention in Nashville, Tenn.

"There's no question we have a seat at the table in this Trump administration," he said.

Duvall went on to recount the blessings that Trump has bestowed on agriculture.

Foremost is the pending rescission of the Obama administration's "waters of the U.S." rule, or WOTUS, which the Farm Bureau feared would expand federal Clean Water Act jurisdiction.

"Our land is our heritage and nothing gets us more riled up than when someone comes onto our land and tells us how to do a job we've been doing for generations," Duvall said.

The installation of Scott Pruitt to head the Environmental Protection Agency has restored a sense of common sense stewardship to that agency, he said.

Likewise, the reduction in size of certain national monuments by Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke has reassured ranchers who depend on those public lands for grazing, Duvall said.

Under the direction of USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue, the Interagency Task Force on Agriculture and Rural Prosperity will scale back a federal bureaucracy that stands in the way of a thriving farming industry, he said.

"He knows how to farm in the face of bad weather, bad markets and bad regulations," Duvall said.

Beneath this jubilation, though, was an undercurrent of anxiety about where the administration may be heading on international trade — particularly regarding the North American Free Trade Agreement, or NAFTA, which low-

ered trade barriers between the U.S., Canada and Mexico.

Before the opening session was held, for example, large buttons proclaiming, "I Support NAFTA," "I Support Trade," and "Farmer For Free Trade," were placed on every seat in the ballroom.

Trump has already proven he's willing to act boldly on trade by withdrawing from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a 12-nation trade deal forged during the Obama administration.

During his presidential campaign, Trump disparaged NAFTA for sending U.S. jobs overseas. Upon becoming president, he was persuaded not to dissolve the agreement in favor of revising it.

Duvall said the president had promised him and other agriculture leaders that NAFTA will be renegotiated to be even more beneficial for American farmers, who export heavily to Canada and Mexico.

"I take the president at his word," he said.

During a later press conference, though, Duvall acknowledged the farm industry is "nervous" about the possibility of the NAFTA talks going awry.

"Nobody really knows what is going on behind closed doors," he said.

It's also troubling the U.S. is focused on renegotiating an old trade deal like NAFTA, which was enacted more than 20 years ago, while other countries are actively pursuing new agreements, he said. "We're very concerned about that."

Duvall said he planned to ask Trump to reassure the industry about international trade during the president's Jan. 8 address to the Farm Bureau.

The organization also came upon another idea to nudge Trump toward seeing the trade issue its way.

In a cavernous hall packed with Farm Bureau members, Duvall and other several employees instructed the growers to engage with the president using his preferred mode of communication: Twitter.

Ultimately, more than 2,300 members connected their smartphones to a Farm Bureau website and sent out a tweet that alerted the president to a message: "Donald Trump delivered from Day 1. Keep working on issues BENEFITING farmers & ranchers: Trade, RegReform, Farm Bill #AFBF18."

## Oregonian runner-up in Farm Bureau YF&R discussion meet

Capital Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Jenny Freeborn of Oregon was the runner-up in the Young Farmers & Ranchers Discussion Meet Jan. 8 at the American Farm Bureau Federation's 2018 Annual Convention & IDEAg Trade Show.

"We are so proud of Jenny. She worked very hard for this and did an outstanding job representing Oregon," said Anne Marie Moss, Oregon Farm Bureau communications director.

Freeborn, who is from Rickreall, Ore., was elected chair of the Oregon Farm Bureau Young Farmers & Ranchers Committee in December. Her father, Dean Freeborn, is a member of the Oregon Farm Bureau board of directors, according to Moss. Her sister, Kathy Hadley, has served as YF&R chair as well.

"Making the Final Four of this competition was literally a dream come true for me. It's



Oregon Farm Bureau

Jenny Freeborn, representing Oregon, participates in the Young Farmers & Ranchers Discussion Meet at the American Farm Bureau Federation convention in Nashville, Tenn. She was the runner-up.

something I've wanted to do since I was 15 years old and participated in an FFA practice discussion meet," Freeborn said in an Oregon Farm Bureau statement. "In 2009, I was in the audience watching the Final Four round in Seattle, and I said to myself,

'I'm going to be on that stage someday.' And yet at the same time, I never thought it would actually happen. When my name was announced for the Final Four, that was both the most shocking and proudest moment of my life."

As runner-up, Freeborn will receive a Case IH Farmall 50A tractor courtesy of Case IH.

The discussion meet simulates a committee meeting in which active discussion and participation are expected. Participants are evaluated on their ability to exchange ideas and information on a predetermined topic, according to a Farm Bureau press release.

In Freeborn's four rounds of competition, the topics of discussion were:

- Round 1 topic: With a growing demand for U.S. farm products abroad, how can agriculture overcome public skepticism of foreign trade to negotiate new trade agreements and open new world markets?

- Round 2 topic: How can Farm Bureau help members with increasing legal and regulatory obstacles so they can focus on farming and ranching?

- Sweet 16 round topic: How can farmers and ranchers maintain their buying power with the continued trend of input supplier and provider consolidations?

- Final Four round topic: Farmers are a shrinking percentage of the population. How can Farm Bureau help first-generation farmers and ranchers get started in agriculture?

Martha Smith of Colorado won the discussion meet. Jared Knock of South Dakota placed third, and fourth place went to Matt Jakubik of Michigan.

The discussion meet was held along with the Young Farmers & Ranchers Achievement Award and Excellence in Agriculture competitions, the winners of which were also announced Monday.

## Farm Bureau members take up immigration reform, farm bill

### Agriculture suffers from labor shortage, depends on crop insurance

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

Apart from international trade, the ongoing agricultural labor shortage and upcoming farm bill were dominant topics at the American Farm Bureau's annual convention.

President Donald Trump campaigned as an immigration hardliner, but the nation's largest farm organization is hopeful that a deal can be struck to alleviate agriculture's labor crunch.

It's necessary to enforce the law, but not in a way that would stop many farmers from doing business, said Zippy Duvall, the Farm Bureau's



Rep. Jerry Moran

president. Dairy producers, for example, can lose a significant portion of their workforce when U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers come looking for a single criminal employee, he said.

Congress should pass a bill that would allow U.S. farmers to legally access workers from other countries where they're abundant, Duvall said.

When asked if Trump stands to lose a large proportion of his strongest supporters by signing such a bill, Duvall said the president is a businessman who understands the industry's need for labor.

The introduction of a bill by Rep. Robert Goodlatte, R-Va., which would create a new farm guestworker pro-

gram, shows there's a desire in Congress to address the problem, Duvall said.

Even so, it's probably going to be difficult to separate the farm labor shortage issue from the broader controversy about immigration, he said.

"We'd like to deal with agricultural labor first," said Duvall. "But I don't think the country is going to let us do that without immigration reform."

As for the farm bill, the Farm Bureau expects to advocate to the Trump administration about the importance of crop insurance, without which many farmers would be unable to secure operating loans, he said.

"Of course, Congress is going to write that bill," Duvall said.

Farm bills are passed periodically by Congress to update programs that assist farmers and provide food assistance to

the needy.

When promoting the need for the farm bill, growers should avoid explaining it as a "safety net," he said.

When described that way, people in other industries wonder why they aren't entitled to a similar protections, he said.

"We have to stop calling it a safety net and start calling it what it is: a food security bill," Duvall said.

Legislation aimed at providing aid to cotton and dairy producers who suffered from natural disasters last year will likely serve as a prelude to the overall farm bill, said Sen. Jerry Moran, R-Kan.

"It will be a sense we've at least gotten those two issues out of the way," he said.

The current farm bill will expire in 2018, but that doesn't necessarily set a deadline for the legislation, which has routinely been delayed in the past, Moran said.